Indeterminate

Sex and Text

The Manuscript Status of *The Hermaphrodite*

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Written around 1847 and published for the first time in 2004, Julia Ward Howe’s novel *The Hermaphrodite* only existed, until Gary Williams’s careful work of resurrection, as three stacks of loose manuscript sheets, fragmented and untitled. Donated to the Houghton Library in 1951 amidst a mass of Howe family papers, these pages were stored together with other of Julia Ward Howe’s prose manuscripts. Most of the other papers in this archival box contain speeches and essays that Howe delivered or published shortly after composition.¹ Howe often worked on loose sheets in this way, leaving a few play manuscripts in a similar state, but most of her poetry and much of her essayistic and travel writing is preserved in clearer order in cheaply bound paper notebooks. For example, on the stationer’s generic label “technology notebook” of one such volume from this period Howe wrote “Poems of Julia Ward Howe published in Griswold’s Collection year 1849.” Some fragments associated with this novel are pasted into a similar notebook dated 1843 and titled more enigmatically with the little rhyme “life is strange and full of change.”² Howe’s only known work of extended narrative fiction, this novel is thus anomalous among Howe’s writings not only in genre and subject matter but also in provenance and material form.
Chapter One

During this period all sorts of Americans tried on the role of author and produced homemade books they never intended for publication. These mid-nineteenth-century American manuscript-books can be viewed as a paean to print and a sign of literature’s swiftly expanding and increasingly intimate place in daily life. The story of ambiguous gender and fluid desire that Howe inscribes on these loose papers expands the canon of legible bodies and longings in antebellum America, but it does so by making public writing that appears not to have been intended—at least in any straightforward way—for public eyes. Thus it offers a strong instance of the transformation of the literary landscape achieved by including unpublished texts in the conception of mid-nineteenth-century American literature.

Howe’s manuscript simultaneously offers, moreover, something quite different: a complex, sustained, and provocative meditation on the significance of material form. In this manuscript Howe seeks a model of identity freed from gendered flesh and a model of writing loosed from the public expectations of print. She suggests layered connections between the indeterminacy of sex and of texts. In this essay I want to follow her lead in thinking about manuscript form not simply as archival fact, but also as a trope, a figure that confronts some of the most fundamental questions about what literature is and what it does. As Andrew Parker and Meredith McGill astutely point out, literary history and media history have always been entwined, even if we have rarely acknowledged the connections between them. A peculiarly “sacred product,” books engage us not only as linguistic and imaginative projections, but also as physical objects loaded with production and market constraints.

In this essay I want to see what happens if I treat the “textual condition” of Howe’s novel, its manuscript status, as constitutive rather than accidental to its content, if I view this bit of media history as integral to Howe’s narrative of ambiguous bodies and shifting, thwarted desires.

The allure of the manuscript harbors contradictions. The most fragile and ephemeral of literary formats, it is also oddly the most substantial, preserving the material trace of the act of composition. These sheets of paper were present when these words were written—they smack, as Jacques Derrida notes of the archive more generally, of the impossible promise of origins. Poised before the mechanical and market interventions of the press, the manuscript precludes the agency of many textual intermediaries—editor, publisher, typesetter, printer, distributor, bookseller, buyer, and most radically, sometimes even of reader. In lieu of the multiplicity promised by print, manuscripts signal singularity, intimacy and authenticity. Literature itself often seeks to harness this effect—think, for example, of the “small roll of dingy paper” that purportedly “authorized and authenticated” The Scarlet
Letter (Hawthorne 32). Yet as textual scholars have long known, actual manuscripts rarely offer the kinds of textual stability and originary certainty this mythology would suggest; in practice manuscripts are full of gaps, discontinuities, and the equally baffling overlapping multiplicity of variant readings, or alternative development. Jerome McGann’s compelling argument for a “socialized concept of authorship and textual authority” strives to understand the act of composition and all the various institutions of reproduction and distribution as conjoined, so that “the history of the text” merges with “the related histories of its production, reproduction, and reception” (McGann 8, 122). Such terms, and especially “reproduction,” provide clear instances of how the problems posed by the body of Howe’s text and the bodies in her text intertwine.

The initial paragraph of The Hermaphrodite, as it has been published by the University of Nebraska Press, is surely not how Julia Ward Howe began her novel. The manuscript starts on a page bearing the number two, and not merely in medias res, but in mid word:

[... ] ration on the part of my parents, it was resolved to invest me with the dignity and insignia of manhood, which would at least permit me to choose my own terms in associating with the world, and secure to me an independence of position most desirable for one who could never hope to become half of another. I was baptized therefore by a masculine name, destined to a masculine profession, and sent to a boarding school for boys, that I might become robust and manly, and haply learn to seem that which I could never be. (Howe, H 3)

It is easy to fetishize manuscripts. In the literary world of representations, manuscripts seem to provide the potent real thing that preserves the trace of a hand behind all the imaginings. The questions of being and seeming—of the real and its approximation—that characterize the imposition of “gender” in this passage reverberate with the physical condition of the passage itself: the fragmented, unfinished state in which Howe left this story. This manuscript page flaunts its partial status, a beginning lopped off: “deliberation?” “declaration?” “narration?” “aberration?” “generation?” (but surely not “admiration”) lost with that missing first page. Yet it is clear that what should have been there already told something of Laurence’s physical form, enough at least to explain this parental prerogative of selecting not just this baby’s name but its gender. Thus for us—late, unexpected readers of this dismembered text, not until now completed by print or reading—the pattern of unfulfillable desire for that other “half” that characterizes Laurence’s life, and indeed all
the unconsummated love stories that swirl through this novel, opens with the first severed word.

This initial paragraph with its account of the pragmatic reasons behind the imposition of a male identity for Laurence emphasizes both the arbitrariness of that decision and the rigidity of the system of gendered power into which this new ambiguous body must be placed. Masculinity may be no more than a thing of signs and names and boarding school socialization, but the attribution of manhood will allow Laurence “to choose my own terms” and will “secure to me an independence of position.” Female limitations in education, property rights, or political participation were becoming increasingly salient sites of debate and activism in the 1840s. Beginning to write this novel, Howe would have been sharply aware of the general obstacles to any such easy capacity to “choose her own terms.” Publishing women could not assume such autonomy. Manuscript production may permit greater independence, and hence the capacity to tell a story of sexual aberration, but only at the price of no longer “associating with the world.”

Howe’s own previous experiences with authorship and publication, like her later fame as author of “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” surely America’s most public poem, somewhat complicate this projection of begrudgingly reclusive female authorship. Her first literary forays may have been largely enabled by the many influential men in her life, most especially by her brother Samuel Ward, but they were nevertheless very empowered and flattering experiences. When she was only seventeen, Julia Ward published an anonymous review of Alphonse de Lamartine’s long poem *Jocelyn* in *The Literary and Theological Review*; “it is not so much the beautiful dress of his sentiments that we admire, as the idea of moral excellence which they convey to us,” she notes (Howe, “*Jocelyn*” 560). Her plot summary of *Jocelyn* highlights the gender mobility of sexual attraction in a way that clearly echoes through *The Hermaphrodite*:

> At last Jocelyn is forced to awake from his blissful dream; the veil is torn from his eyes; Laurence the youth who he had so fondly loved, is a beautiful maiden, and instead of his adopted brother, becomes the object of his adoration. The sudden and strange transition from one state of feeling to another overwhelmed him, and he sinks beneath the despair occasioned by this terrible change. (Howe, “*Jocelyn*” 569)

Julia Ward “did not neglect to profit,” as Howe puts it in her *Reminiscences*, from the extensive library of Continental literature that her brother Samuel accumulated during his four year sojourn in Europe: “I lived, indeed, much in
my books. . . . Like a young damsel of olden time, shut up within an enchanted
castle” (Howe, Rem 46, 49). Williams describes how her particular readings
in Lamartine and other French authors, especially George Sand, would have
provided her with “certain specifics—a character’s name, a narrative circum-
stance, a theme” (Williams, “Speaking” xx). Such literary influences epitomize
the remarkable volatility of literary texts; to the extent that The Hermaphro-
dite reimagines Jocelyn the transformations entailed disregarding the borders
of language, nationality, and genre in order to work “a strange transition” or
a “terrible change” of their own.

In 1839 Julia Ward published another review, this one of John Dwight’s
translations of Goethe and Schiller. Both these youthful publications are
remarkable for their confident tone of assessment and their willingness to
make large claims about the nature of poetry and the comparative poetic
resources of the German, French, and English language. The unusual breadth
of her literary preparation and the assured authorial “we” with which this
young woman voices her judgments occlude the bodily particularities of age,
gender, and nationality. “Closer acquaintance with the two greatest bards of
Germany, could not fail to influence most favorably the literature, and espe-
cially the poetry of the day,” she avers (Howe, “Goethe” 394). The transat-
lantic reach of Julia Ward’s reading belittles more nationalist conceptions of
American literary production and registers, as Wai Chee Dimock puts it, how
“[w]hat we call ‘American’ literature, is quite often a shorthand, a simplified
name for a much more complex tangle of relationships” (Dimock, Continents
3). The dual nature of the literary artifact, as text and thing, is crucial to the
temporal and geographical tangle Dimock describes; and Howe’s “enchanted
castle” of books attests at once to the magical capacity of reading to move
across time and space and to the material conditions that enabled her banker
father “to build a study, whose walls were entirely occupied by my brother’s
books” (Howe, Rem 46).

A further marker of the institutional networks that gird the literary, Julia
Ward’s early reviews were themselves reviewed. The lauds make it clear that,
despite her anonymous masquerade in print, many in New York’s literary
circles recognized the young female author of these publications: “It is,” The
New-Yorker noted of her review of the Dwight anthology, “a piece that would
be highly becoming and creditable to the talents of an elegantly educated and
highly accomplished woman” (April 1839). In 1839 the memorial poem that
she wrote at the death of her music teacher, the pianist Daniel Schlesinger,
was sung at his burial and printed in two New York papers. Gender is cer-
tainly at play in her modest recourse to anonymity and the press’s somewhat
patronizing terms of praise for her work, but a sense of capacity and access
predomina tes. Howe’s retrospective portrait of her young self wryly emphasizes such ambition and possibility: “Through all these years there went with me the vision of some great work or works which I myself should give to the world. I should write the novel or play of the age. This, I need not say, I never did” (Howe, Rem 59).

By the time she began work on The Hermaphrodite, her assured sense of “associating with the world” through publication had become far more fraught as the result of her marriage with Samuel Gridley Howe in April 1843. Eighteen years her senior, Samuel Howe was a controversial and celebrated public figure with a hand in a wide array of social issues from the Greek War of Independence to prison and educational reforms. By the time Julia met him he had become director of the Perkins Institution for the Blind, where he had famously taught the use of language to the blind and deaf Laura Bridgman. There were literary aspects to Samuel Howe’s celebrity: he had not only written influentially about the Greek cause but returned from the war with a helmet and sword that had belonged to Lord Byron, and his work with Laura Bridgman was the subject of much admiration and speculation among literary figures of the period.6 Indeed, Julia Ward became acquainted with Samuel Howe largely through his close friendship with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Throughout his adult life Samuel Howe’s most intimate social tie remained the punningly titled “Five of Clubs,” a group that gathered to discuss literature and politics in Longfellow’s Harvard suites, and that in addition to Howe and Longfellow also included Charles Sumner, George Hillard, and the classicist Cornelius Felton. As recent biographers have detailed, the Howes’ marriage was never easily harmonious, and Julia’s accounts of their conflict often center on Samuel’s failure to value her literary aspirations and his opposition to her publishing her writings (and later to her public lectures). On the evening of their anniversary Julia bitterly noted in her diary:

I have been married twenty two years today. In the course of that time I have never known my husband to approve of any act of mine which I myself value. Books—poems—plays—everything has been contemptible or contraband in his eyes.[7]

Even in the early years of their marriage, when she was more hopeful that they could find mutuality, Julia describes their differences in terms of a struggle between her aesthetic/emotional/spiritual commitments and his material “world of actualities”:

I have to come to him, have left my poetry, my music, my religion, have walked with him in his cold world of actualities. There I have learned much,
but there I can do nothing. He must come to me, must have ears for my music, must have a soul for my faith. My nature is to sing, to pray, to feel. His is to fight, to teach, to reason. But love and patience may bring us much nearer together than we are.⁸

Despair over the obstacles of becoming “half” of another, critiques of the stultifying constraints of gender norms—these have biographical grounds for Howe. Most of the scant scholarship that addresses *The Hermaphrodite* reads it in relation to the Howes’ difficult marriage and Julia Ward Howe’s own fraught sense of gendered self-division. I find this work interesting and largely convincing as biography, but while the questions I am asking about the relations between material form and literary meaning are entwined with these concerns, they are also somewhat different. Still, it seems important to note that the problems of material form at stake in this text undoubtedly have biographical determinants, and much of their sense of obsessive repetition and fraught urgency reflects the ways in which these are alive and crucial problems for Howe, questions she is wrestling with as she writes, not answers she has found.⁹

A letter that Julia Ward Howe wrote to her sister Louisa on May 15, 1847, provides the only evidence Williams has identified that dates Howe’s work on this manuscript. In it the problems of material form for the human body and for the literary text juxtapose. In earlier portions of the letter that Williams does not quote, Howe vividly describes her sense of the poor fit between her skills and her domestic responsibilities:

> I have spoiled a good student to make a most indifferent wife. . . . The longer I live, the more do I feel my utter childlike helplessness about all practical affairs. Certainly a creature with such asleep hands was never before seen. . . . For everything that is not soul, I am an ass, that I am. (Howe, Papers MS Am 2119)

The Howes’ first daughter had been born at the Palazzetto Torlonia in Rome in March of 1844 near the end of the couple’s lengthy wedding trip. Those fifteen months in Europe were Julia Ward Howe’s first physical encounter with the places she had so avidly occupied in her reading. Their second daughter was born back in Boston, at the Perkins Institution, in August 1845. At the time she wrote this letter Julia was pregnant with their third child. The letter expresses her humorous but adamant sense of collision between the realms of “soul,” the linguistic gifts of that “good student,” and the intensely physical requirements of marriage and motherhood. She rues her unskilled hands, but in the midst of her third pregnancy in four years she feels herself
caught up in the “creature” pressures of the body. In this same letter Julia sends her sister a poem entitled “Eva and Rafael,” characters whose love story is narrated in the final section of The Hermaphrodite. She remarks in a divergence from her girlhood patterns of literary dissemination, “I have made quite a little romance about them, but have kept it for my own amusement, the cold praise and ardent criticism of the club not being at all to my taste, and the comparison with Longodingdongo utterly insufferable.” “Longo” and “Longodongo” were the Five of Clubs’s favored nicknames for the short-statured Longfellow, making it clear that Julia was less anxious about publicity in general than about the approbation of her husband’s “club,” and most particularly the comparison between her project and aesthetics and that of Longfellow. The Harvard professor had read the manuscript of his epic poem Evangeline aloud to the Five of Clubs during much of the previous winter, and the poem would be published to great acclaim later that year. Samuel Howe would enthusiastically congratulate his friend on producing with Evangeline “A book! A book that pleases and instructs and improves people, what a gift it is to the world!”10 The heroine of Howe’s romance has a name that echoes that of Longfellow’s, and both poetic narratives center on the extraordinary constancy of the love of their Evas, similarities that make all the more apparent the difference between the mystical, allegorical setting of Howe’s text and Longfellow’s insistently historical and American “Tale of Acadie.” In these echoes and differences Howe seems to be quite self-consciously placing her work outside the instructive, public, and national literary project that Longfellow represents. Instead, writing primarily for her “own amusement,” without the clear goal of publication so evident in much of her other work or the improving qualities her husband values in Longfellow’s, the peculiar advantages and uncertainties of manuscript transmission become part of the story of “equivocal form” (Howe, H19) and the inevitably unfulfilled desires that she seeks to tell.

The only other shard of evidence about Howe’s production of The Hermaphrodite manuscript is one undated passage pasted into the “life is strange” notebook. The passage suggests both her awareness of this story’s failure to conform to genre expectations for published novels and the hope that it might be read by some trusted eyes:

Yet my pen has been unusually busy during the last year—it has brought me some happy inspirations, and though the golden tide is now at its ebb, I live in the hope that it may rise again in time to float off the stranded wreck of a novel, or rather story, in which I have been deeply engaged for three months past. It is not, understand me, a moral and fashionable work, des-
tined to be published in three volumes, but the history of a strange being, written as truly as I know how to write it. Whether it will ever be published, I cannot tell, but I should like to have you read it, and to talk with you about it. (Quoted in Williams, HH 81)

There is no evidence that Howe made any other attempts to publish this text. Her praise for Jocelyn sees no conflict between the androgynous figure of Lamartine’s Laurence and the “moral excellence” of that poem, but this note suggests not only that her manuscript fails to conform to the “fashionable” standards she generally disdained, but also that it chafes against her conception of the moral, or at least of what the novel-buying public would consider moral. This sense of her present project as unlikely to be published appears however within a complex mesh of evidence of her pleasure in the process of composition and her desire for at least this one unknown reader’s response. At various moments in writing this manuscript Howe does turn, parenthetically, to address an imagined reader, calling attention to the mechanics of narration “(Kind reader, weary not of our endless conversations—must we not introduce you to them also?)” as well as to its vulnerabilities “—kind reader, be not too severe upon this last doubtful sentence—” (Howe H 136, 155). Thus even as Howe makes no recorded effort to publish this text, to enlist it in the material processes of the literary marketplace and its circuits of production and reception, the mere fact of address conjures a scene of reading.

Along with the hope and happiness of the “golden tide” of literary inspiration, Howe’s note registers the structural problems of this text, the extent to which for all her pleasures in it she recognizes it as something of a “stranded wreck.” These few sentences refer to her manuscript as “novel,” “story” and “history”; her letter to Louisa denotes the “Eva and Rafael” strand as “a romance.” If the physical and psychic indeterminacies of gender are what make Howe’s “strange being” strange, that strangeness seems also to suffuse the narrative determinants of genre. “It was difficult to determine your sex with precision, it was in fact impossible,” Laurence’s father explains (Howe, H 29), and this sense of the impossibility of finding stable categories and precise meanings, even where one would most expect them, permeates the novel as a problem not only of sex but also of text.

Even as he embodies indeterminacy, however, the “strange being” of Laurence unites the fragmented pieces of this text; it is the presence of this character in all the variously numbered and materially different segments of this manuscript (even if his name is rendered as “Laurent” in one of them) that convinced Gary Williams that these various stacks of pages could be read as a
single literary object. Since Laurence serves as narrator, moreover, the novel, if it is a novel, speaks through him. But if Laurence holds this text together, what kind of glue can “he” provide, since even that pronoun is clearly marked from the first sentences we have as an essentially arbitrary attribution. The life story Laurence tells is insistently un-unified: gender, sexual desire, geography, age, pedagogical status, sanity, and even the boundary between life and death all shift for Laurence from one segment of the text to the next with dizzying rapidity. Such radical instability raises haunting questions, often fraught with desperation and loneliness, and yet as they persist and multiply throughout the text’s chaotic layers of plot and relationships, they pose the possibility that, after all, such instability might prove more interesting, even more satisfying, than any more singular perspective could. Or, as Berto puts it with his characteristic acerbity: “Know that I abhor onesidedness, fixed idea, and all the insanities of the learned. For them, the earth should stand still, for me, it turns round, and shews me a new face every day” (Howe, H 95). “The semantic flexibility of queer—its weird ability to touch almost everything—is one of the most exciting things about it,” Heather Love explains and then worries “whether queer actually becomes more effective as it surveys more territory”; it is precisely that sort of weird flexibility and territorial reach that makes this fragmented manuscript text so queer, so exciting, and also so constantly at risk of disintegration (Love, “Queers” 182–83).

Heather Love’s concern is the tension between minoritizing and universalizing strategies for queer politics. If her sentences so richly describe the dynamics of Howe’s text, it is because the stakes of identity and the obstacles to coalition at the center of her argument are also crucial for Laurence. The difficulties of maintaining narrative unity that beset this novel appear to Laurence as the impossibility of making meaningful connection at all: “a human soul simply as such and not invested with the capacity of either entire possession or entire surrender, has but a lame and unsatisfactory part to play in this world,” he complains (Howe, H 5). It is easy for us as twenty-first-century readers to recognize the rigid absolute poles of “entire possession or entire surrender” as decidedly more problematic than the kind of rotating flexibility that Berto espouses. But it seems clear that for Howe the appeal of putting this ambiguously sexed figure at the center of her project derives both from such a strange being’s “weird ability to touch almost everything” and from his/her incapacity to fully grasp anyone. What this manuscript inscribes over and over again, in endlessly shifting configurations, are stories of what the characters experience as impossible loves.12

I find The Hermaphrodite a useful site for thinking about manuscript form because its own production history as an unpublished text is reiterated
within it, not only by the patterns of instability and unfulfilled desire I have described above, but also by repeated scenes in which manuscripts play a significant role. In fact, manuscript transmission figures importantly in most of the impossible love stories that Howe inscribes in this text. Simultaneously form and theme, Howe’s depiction of manuscripts presents literary production itself as desire. For the remainder of this essay I will look in detail at these scenes of manuscript transmission.

In the first of the novel’s love stories, Laurence is challenged to prove a worthy courtier for the lovely Emma by writing poetry: “I hastily improvised some verses, and wrote them in pencil, the crown of my hat serving me for a desk” (Howe, H 8). This sense of Laurence’s writing as slight, lacking any of the instruments of serious effort and lasting production—no time, no plans, no desk, no ink—continues to characterize his poetic endeavors. But Howe makes it clear that such hasty improvisation is in fact the mark not of the superficial, but of the true: “I had written my poem without labour, almost without any fixed design, it was but a piece of my everyday thought ... the poem has written itself” (Howe, H 10). Laurence throws these assertions of a poetry without craft against the jibes of his highly stylized fellow students, competitors for the poetry prize that Emma will bestow. When they demand his topic all he can say is that his is a poem “to nothing and nobody” (Howe, H 10). This account of the truly poetic as ultimately divorced from all of the contingencies of material form, scholarly preparation, and even subject matter identifies what is literary about literature in an ideal of unanchored language and thought.

As the contest approaches, this dematerialization of the literary really happens to Laurence’s poem. Wilhelm, a rival for Emma’s affection, asks to buy Laurence’s poem and so exclude him from the competition:

“Name your price, and sell me your poem.”
“I am no Judas to sell my soul for thirty pieces of silver.”
“It shall be no mean price, my patrimony is large, ask whatever you will.”
“If I should sell it thrice over I could not make it yours,” said I, with some haughtiness. “Children will claim their own parents.”
“Then thus do I commit your first born to the flames.” (Howe, H 11)

It is easy to understand that the traditional (male) trope of textual production as childbirth may have had little appeal for Howe as she juggled writ-
ing and babies. Such scorn for the literary marketplace, for the selling of poems and the reproduction of print, similarly endorses the unsold status of this manuscript novel (no “fashionable work . . . in three volumes”). The particular rhetoric of this passage with its stress on “patrimony” and poetic “children” evokes both questions of textual reproduction and the issues of inheritance and of Laurence’s physical incapacity to produce heirs that will provoke moments of crises in the novel’s plot. Thus it is significant that ultimately the novel dismisses these potential reproductive traumas as irrelevant; Laurence’s scorn at his father’s decision to disown him, for instance, exceeds even his haughtiness here. Likewise, the burning of the manuscript proves no loss as Laurence, who, “with a voice of silvery sweetness, and in a measure peculiarly my own,” recites his poem from memory to win the crown (Howe, H 14). The silver Laurence would not accept for his poetry becomes part of its utterance, as does all that is unique and peculiar about his being. The judges select Laurence’s poem on the tautological grounds that it is “beautifully poetical,” and throughout this segment Howe emphasizes the immaterial quality of literary excellence. Laurence’s poem, to the extent that it has a subject, tells of such release from bodily form: “I closed with some thrilling numbers descriptive of the noble scorn with which the pure spirit refused to bear the unworthy burden of the flesh” (Howe, H 14). Thus the apparent fragility of the material manuscript merely masks its immaterial literary power: the paper may burn but the poem, like that disembodied pure spirit, seems indestructible.

As an articulation of desire, however, Laurence’s poem proves deeply destructive. Yearning to determine that Laurence “is not one of those unsexed souls” his poem celebrates (Howe, H 15), Emma offers him her body with extraordinary explicitness: “look you, I am here alone, in your room, in your power, at dead of night—you cannot misinterpret this” (Howe, H 18). Her insistence on immediate physical presence (“look,” “here”) strives to foreclose any need for representation or interpretation. Laurence attempts to keep their relationship within the disembodied, ideal sphere he had expressed in his poem, evoking “relations independent of sex, relations of pure spirit, of heavenly sympathy, of immaterial and undying affinities” (Howe, H 18). But Emma is here, in his room, at dead of night, and while Laurence voices this bland idealizing language of immateriality, she does “look” with detailed particularity:

She surveyed me from head to foot, the disordered habiliments revealing to her every outline of the equivocal form before her. She saw the bearded lip and earnest brow, but she saw also the falling shoulders, slender neck, and
rounded bosom—then with a look like that of the Medusa, and a hoarse utterance, she murmured: “monster!”

“I am as God made me, Emma.”

A shriek, fearful to hear, and thrice fearful to give, followed by another and another, and a maniac lay foaming and writhing on the floor at my feet. (Howe, H 19)

The act of surveying Laurence’s body changes Emma’s appearance as well: the verb “to look” transmutes into a noun, “a look,” just as her act of calling Laurence “monster” seems to transform her into one. The enumeration of Laurence’s physical features utterly dissolves Emma’s mind, voice, and body. Laurence’s uncharacteristically simple sentence of self-acceptance would be deeply moving anywhere else in this novel, but here his capacity to say “I am” contrasts painfully with the dissolution of Emma into indefinite articles “a shriek,” “a maniac.” With her madness and death, the poetic ideal of “pure spirit” disentangled from “the unworthy burthen of the flesh” appears at best a profoundly destructive delusion.

Medusa, of course, turns to stone those she looks upon. Emma had earlier complained that Laurence was like marble (Howe, H 12). The word “hermaphrodite” is used in the novel only in reference to a statue as observers shock Laurence by comparing him to “the lovely hermaphrodite in the villa Borghese” (Howe, H 16). The portion of the manuscript that focuses on Laurence’s relationship with Ronald also contains a scene of manuscript transmission that repeats and inverts aspects of the scene with Emma. In this segment it is Ronald who writes the poem, and it is Laurence who stands over Ronald’s bed. Ronald composes his poem not for a university competition but in lieu of an academic assignment; it is about falling in love with a statue. 

. . . he placed the paper in my hands. It was indeed no thesis, no boyish composition, but a poetical version of a popular legend, right gracefully rendered. The verses have long since escaped from my memory, but I can well recall the meaning of the story. It was that of a pilgrim who had long worshipped the marble image of a saint, so long, that it was become to him the truest of realities. At length, in the madness of his passionate longing, he impiously prayed God that it might become human for his sake. The prayer was heard, the miracle was granted. The beautiful saint breathed, smiled, spake, and descended from her marble pedestal—the lover opened his arms to clasp her to his heart, but lo! at the first touch, it had ceased to beat—the cold embrace was death. (Howe, H 74–75)
The language of this poem has “escaped” Laurence’s memory, unlike his own school poem that he so easily recited after the paper was gone. Laurence’s poem celebrates escape from the bonds of flesh; Ronald’s poem yearns for embodiment. “Long . . . long . . . long . . . longing . . . lo!”: this poem has been lost to memory, transmuted into prose, but its refrain of desire remains.

The androgynous conflations associated with Laurence’s “equivocal form” permeate and shape the whole of Laurence’s relationship with Ronald. Gender appears fluid and flexible between them, as they both in turn play masculine and feminine roles. In this relationship the thing that seems most troubling about Laurence is not the ambiguities of gender in his body or his behavior, but rather the equivocal status of his desire itself. Ronald, like the pilgrim of his poem, is tenacious in his passion, while Laurence dodges and evades. In this scene he is pedantically defensive, describing the legend as “oft-told” and “sufficiently commonplace” but praising the “harmonious klang of the versification” and using his role as teacher to press for interpretation: “but what may be the intended moral of it?” he asks (Howe, H 75). Standing by Laurence’s bed, Emma had insisted: “you cannot misinterpret this.” Ronald’s desire is similarly legible, but faced with desire, Laurence seems set on misreading, not just Ronald’s longings but also his own. Just before showing this poem to Laurence, Ronald had described a “glorious dream” of Laurence as a woman “young and beautiful as the Hebe of the Gods” (Howe, H 74). After their discussion of the poem, Ronald goes to bed “little dreaming,” explains Laurence, who has planned his departure without telling the boy, “that he should wake in the morning and find me gone” (Howe, H 76). But with the “postillion” already at the door Laurence “lingers” to watch Ronald sleep:

Scarce knowing what I did, I stooped to print the lightest, faintest kiss upon his forehead; but as I did so, his red lips parted, and he murmured: “Laurence!” I shrank back into myself. I turned away, lest a tear should fall upon his face. (Howe, H 76)

As his bodily fluid threatens to fall near Ronald’s parted red lips, in the erotics of this scene Laurence plays not the beautiful young woman but the man’s part. He refrains, however: “shrank back into myself”; if in Howe’s telling poetic manuscripts somehow serve to bring the lover to the beloved’s bedside, they nevertheless fail to achieve consummation. No “print” occurs. After this night Ronald rejects text as a medium for expressing desire: “Do not write to me any more of your affection for me—if you love me, come to me, and prove it” (Howe, H 77).
The literary mode that produces their most intense sexual encounter is the embodied medium of theatrical performance. Enlisted to play Juliet in a student theatrical, Laurence describes with the “surrender” of the passive voice how in that performative crossing of nation, gender, and age, “I found myself giving a fervent expression to the glowing words of the Italian woman-child” (Howe, H 81). This scene can be seen to epitomize the temporal and geographical mobility of literature (a sixteenth-century English author writing words for a fourteenth-century “Italian woman-child” to be performed by a group of students at a nineteenth-century German university, the whole imagined scene created by a woman in Boston). However, instead of insisting that the power of poetry results from its capacity to escape material form, to approximate “pure spirit,” Laurence experiences the performance of Shakespeare’s poetry as a profoundly embodied physical transformation. For Ronald the effect of watching Laurence play Juliet has an even more momentous bodily impact:

“You can change my torments to raptures of heaven. You shall be a man to all the world, if you will, but a woman, a sweet, warm, living woman to me—you must love me, Laurence.”

[...]
Still, other words of terrible import, half heard and dimly comprehended; still that terrible grasp, straining me closer and closer to the heart which, once pure and peaceful, was now in its hour of volcanic might and ruin. On my part, a faint but rigid struggle, a sob, a mute and agonized appeal to heaven—that appeal was not answered. Suddenly, I felt Ronald shiver and tremble—gaining courage, I raised my eyes to his face, and saw the burning flush pass, in an instant, from his cheek—exhaustion was already subduing the fever of his wound, maddened by wine—a certain confusion of thought was visible in his countenance. This was the moment—by the mercy of God, I took advantage of it. (Howe, H 86–88)

I think it undecidable whether this scene should be read as rape or as mutually satisfying sex, as consummation achieved or averted. But even with such obfuscations there is no question that this encounter explodes the bounds of moral or fashionable publication in mid-nineteenth-century America. Almost a decade after Howe wrote these lines, Walt Whitman would assign his deictic “I” to the bodies of both male and female lovers. In the 1860s Emily Dickinson would leave among her unpublished manuscripts the same love poem addressed to “him” and to “her.” But I cannot think of any American prose narrative of this period that describes sex with this level of physi-
cal explicitness or this kind of gender fluidity—never mind both. Melville’s portrait of the “cosy, loving pair” of Ishmael chatting in bed with “Queequeg now and then affectionately throwing his brown tattooed legs over mine” is, as Ishmael himself explains, remarkable not for its physical intensity, but because the two are “so entirely sociable and free and easy” (Melville 55). Gary Williams is right to suggest that the contours of literary possibility were different in Europe. But this is precisely an example of how media history and literary history diverge. Literature can cross national, linguistic, and period borders in reading: Julia Ward in her New York library could revel in the novels of George Sand, but the processes of print production remain more rigidly local, constrained by the morals and fashion of particular national and temporal markets. These scenes of intensely physical, multivalent, queer desire prompted within the narrative by the national mobility and public performance of Shakespeare’s “glowing words” are precisely what consign Howe’s story to the privacy of this manuscript page.

The manuscripts in these scenes of manuscript transmission are poetry. Thus along with the issues of materiality and desire enacted by these scenes is the question of genre. What is the relationship between the manuscript novel that holds them and the manuscript poems that circulate inside it? Wai Chee Dimock proposes genre as an alternative to nationality or period as a means of mapping literature. Her account of genre recognizes it “less as a law, a rigid taxonomic landscape, and more as a self-obsolating system” and remarks in terms that evoke the volatile bodies of this text that “bending and pulling and stretching are unavoidable, for what genre is dealing with is a volatile body of material, still developing, still in transit, and always on the verge of taking flight in some unknown and unpredictable direction” (Dimock, Continents 73–74). In the two scenes of manuscript transmission that appear in the first segment of Howe’s novel, the poetic manuscripts that characters produce are summarized—that is, transmuted into prose, “self-obsolating” indeed. In the Italian segments of Howe’s text, the literary manuscripts that characters share are not new productions of the moment, as they were in the first part, and they are rendered whole inside Howe’s text. The first is a poem that Berto had written in a fruitless effort to convince Eleonora (who had pledged herself to a convent) to choose instead life and its truths:

“Read these foolish jingles,” he said abruptly. “I once could rhyme.”

The verse ran thus:

What seek’st thou in the Convent aisle,
The gloomy Convent aisle, ladye?
Berto calls his poems “desperate expedients” and admits that on hearing them Eleonora seeks to convert him, murmuring, “there is little hope, but I will pray the Virgin for you” (Howe, H 100–101). Both the poem and the story of Eleonora as a whole are essentially tangential. Berto could have told this story unchanged without producing the poem, and while the inclusion of the history of Eleonora gives Howe an opportunity to voice anti-Catholic sentiments, and it certainly reiterates her material/spiritual themes and provides the enigmatic Berto with a bit of backstory, the elision of Eleonora’s story would have no significant effect on any of the other plots. But if the inclusion of this poem inside this novel has little impact on plot, it does raise interesting questions about genre. Berto presents poetry as a genre of the past (“I once could rhyme”), and his poem is gaudily archaic in its diction. Media history reveals quite different trajectories for lyric poetry and fictional prose. The lyric had what Arthur Marotti calls “an extended life in manuscript transmission” with poems continuing to circulate in manuscript form long into the era of print dominance. Berto’s archaic diction might call attention to the history of poetic manuscripts, the cache of coterie circulation, but in nineteenth-century America the manuscript circulation of poetry was far from an anachronistic practice. Indeed, in autograph books, friendship albums, and personal miscellanies, the composition and manuscript circulation of lyric poems flourished, employed in a wide array of settings to elaborate social bonds and attest to personal cultivation. The novel, in contrast, has generally been recognized as a genre of the press, its “rise” deeply implicated in the “printing revolution.” Thus the play of genres in Howe’s text can be understood as an expression of the varied stakes of print and manuscript form.

The final segment of Howe’s manuscript novel largely focuses on the reading of a manuscript, and interestingly one of unusually mixed genre. The prose narrative “little romance” of Eva and Rafael contains poetic sequences of Eva’s prayerful songs and a “funeral chorus—sung by the dead, when Eva buried Rafael,” as well as scenes in which Eva’s conversations with the spirits and angels are rendered like a theatrical script (Howe, H 181). In addition to its conflation of genres, the manuscript also bridges two major strands of Howe’s meandering plot, since Laurence identifies the text as “the legacy, possibly the composition of the dead uncle whose posthumous hospitality had given me shelter in my evil days” (Howe, H 163). This manuscript serves as a link between the German/Swiss hermitage where Laurence and Ronald

Thou’rt full of young and lovely life,
So is the world God made for thee. (Howe, H 99)
first met and Laurence's present situation, disguised as “Cecilia” and living in Rome with Count Berto's sisters. The sisters remark that the manuscript must be read slowly because they are “not yet strong either in the German tongue, or in German mysticism” (Howe, H 166). Thus in a wide range of ways, Howe presents this last and most elaborate scene of manuscript transmission as an effort to unify much of what is most chaotic and fragmentary about her “stranded wreck” of a text.

Laurence recalls the existence of this manuscript during a bout of loneliness, as two of Berto's sisters, Briseida and Gigia, sit in the palazzo garden with their lovers:

> It was obviously a matter of astonishment to every animate and inanimate thing there, that I durst venture into a lover's paradise, myself unloving and unloved. I was ashamed to be there, ashamed to display my loneliness before their eyes. (Howe, H 164)

Laurence seeks out this manuscript as a solace to shame. “If . . . the lowering of the eyelids, the lowering of the eyes, the hanging of the head is the attitude of shame, it may also be that of reading,” Eve Sedgwick muses (“Shame in the Cybernetic Fold” 114). Her meditations on Silvan Tomkins's theories of affect recognize that “shame is itself a form of communication,” “the place where the question of identity arises most originarily and most relationally,” or as Howe puts it here, “loneliness before their eyes” (“James,” 36–37). Briseida insists that the reading of this manuscript must be public, not private: “You must not take it to your room,” she decrees, suggesting instead that the manuscript be read aloud to the pairs of lovers. Reading serves to bridge what is broken in relationship, and it is itself relational. The love story told in this manuscript is the only portion of this text that we have clear evidence Howe actually permitted someone to read; as we have seen, Howe enclosed a poem she identifies as “Eva to Raphael” in her May 15, 1847, letter to her sister Louisa. There she describes it as “a scrap from an imaginary heroine to her imaginary love” and marks her willingness to share more of what she had composed of the lovers’ “correspondence.” Laurence's shameful sense of radical aloneness on display is mirrored in this passage by a similarly paradoxical doubling between the animate and the inanimate. “It was obviously a matter of astonishment to every animate and inanimate thing,” Laurence claims, oblivious in his hyperbole of shame to how in feeling astonishment an “inanimate thing” becomes animate. The difficulty of reconciling animate desire with inanimate flesh is a crucial dilemma for Eva and Rafael, lovers separated by death. Moreover, it is a striking expression of the simultane-
ously literary and material nature of books: a book is, after all, the perfect animate inanimate thing.

Laurence’s description of this manuscript emphasizes its material features. A treasured heirloom, this text is no unprotected scrap quickly burnt:

The costly case enclosing the sacred relic was now produced—it was of precious wood, richly carved, and inlaid with gold and precious stones. On the first leaf of the parchment within were written these words:

Ashes of an angel’s heart

The kindness of Berto enables me to subjoin an entire copy of what I then read. (Howe, H 166)

The final line of this passage is quite uncharacteristic for Howe’s novel. I can think of no other portion of the text in which Laurence so explicitly gestures toward the act of writing that would have produced the story we read. Thus there is unusual self-consciousness in this manuscript’s account of how it has come to include this other manuscript within it. Furthermore, this final section proves the most fragmented portion of the novel, the one place in which Williams had to construct a single narrative out of overlapping partial sources. Howe has written out multiple versions of the scenes in which Berto’s sisters and their lovers respond to hearing this text. This scene is drafted not only on the large blank sheets that Howe uses to write everything else that remains of this manuscript, but other smaller sheets as well (onion skin stationery, large folded folio pages, a small heavy blue bit of writing paper written on both sides). These different drafts record slightly variant reactions, suggesting that there is something about this act of reception that Howe finds difficult to compose. The hand (manus), scripting for no reader, multiplies accounts of narrative reception. Laurence himself seems to have a similar sense of conflicting narrative claims, explaining in two slightly differing versions that “the conversation dropped into a couple of tête à tête murmurs, both of which I was skillful enough to overhear” (Howe, H 165, composed from fragments reprinted on pp. 205 and 206). Virginia Jackson (2005) raises related issues about Emily Dickinson’s poetry, asking whether we should think of them as lyrics in the traditional sense or rather, in their author’s clear refusal of public utterance, whether it isn’t necessary to acknowledge the eavesdropper’s impudence of our readings and approach these poems not as words spoken to us but as words overheard. This sense of a composition that arises out of piecing together the “overheard,” characterizes even the story told in “Ashes of an angel’s heart” where Eva’s songs of loyalty for her dead partner are overheard by others who seek to offer her
their earthly love instead. There are ironies certainly in a composition and transmission history that has left in shreds the story of a manuscript guarded as sacred relic and of a love adamant in its indestructible singularity. Unlike all the other love stories in this book, the story of Eva and Rafael ends in perfect union—“two forms locked in one fervent embrace”—a heavenly reward earned, Rafael explains, because Eva’s “eye was single” (Howe, H 181, 180). In a novel in which sexual identity and sexual desires are so fluid and multiple, this manuscript’s stress on singularity can seem an immensely conservative imposition. The patched, overheard nature of this text and the fluctuating genres of its telling hint, however, at the precarious status of such claims. The title of this manuscript, after all, is “Ashes.” Most important, for all its unitary rhetoric, the actual effect of this manuscript within the novel is very strange indeed.

The reading of the manuscript casts a “spell” (Howe, H 182) on its hearers, most powerfully on the youngest sister Nina, whose trance-like loyalty to her lover, exiled to America, imitates Eva’s dedication and enables her to follow Gaetano’s journey in her imagination.21 Possessed by the story in the manuscript Nina truly becomes an “imaginary heroine” of an “imaginary love.” Nina’s “clairvoyante” travels in America to accompany her exiled lover—planting corn, fighting grizzly bears, looking on Niagara—are the only instances when this American novel engages with the American continent. The America of Nina’s imaginary journey is an emphatically mythic space of “wilderness” (Howe, H 159), not a bit like the New York and Boston settings of Howe’s experience. In that sense America is just as fully a figment of the literary imagination as Howe’s many highly romantic European castles and hermitages, counts and barons. Nina is explicit that her imaginary travels occur through books:

“Gaetano, I shall follow you every step of the way—” “how so?” he asked, and she led him to her little boudoir, and showed him spread upon the table a provision of maps, charts, and books of travel. “These will be my guides,” she said. (Howe, H 137)

The “provision” books make available to her is immensely powerful. Eva and Rafael, Nina and Gaetano are the only love stories in this text that can claim any sort of sustained mutuality. But in both cases the unions they provide come at the cost of embodiment. These are in fact the relations of “pure spirit” Laurence sang of, and the “woe” of their physical inadequacy is poignant and palpable: Nina “held up her arms, ‘somehow they are always empty’” (Howe, H 142, see also 139).
Literature, as Elaine Scarry reminds us, is an experience of empty arms, one “almost bereft of any sensuous content”:

its visual features, as has often been observed, consist of monotonous small black marks on a white page. It has no acoustical features. Its tactile features are limited to the weight of its pages, their smooth surfaces, and their exquisitely thin edges. The attributes it has that are directly apprehensible by perception are, then, meager in number. More important, these attributes are utterly irrelevant, sometimes even antagonistic, to the mental images that a poem or novel seeks to produce (steam rising across a windowpane, the sound of a stone dropped in a pool, the feel of dry August grass underfoot). (Scarry 5)

Scarry’s description is wonderful for the ways it produces the very mimetic literary effects that are her topic, conjuring the exquisitely thin pages of a book and the sound of a dropping stone. The mysteries of mimesis have been a preoccupation of literary analysis since at least the time of Aristotle. The relationship between the material and the immaterial—how language can conjure a world, how an inanimate book can animate the imagination—has long been a core issue of literary understanding. The would-be lovers of Howe’s novel do indeed “dream by the book” and so testify to the power but also the limitations of literary making.

When he first took refuge in the hermitage, accepting the Count’s “posthumous hospitality,” Laurence had been much struck by the diverse range of the Count’s reading: “I mused upon their mutual differences and excommunications, I imagined that the Count had spoken thus with himself ‘God hath sent them all into the world, why should I not receive them into my library?’” (Howe, H 39). Thus the library in which “Ashes” purports to have been composed exemplifies the multi-vocality of the literary. The Count’s library seems at first an ideal figuration of what literature is and does. The books on the shelves, Laurence thinks, “had each a voice . . . and spake to me, and all invited me to come and dwell there, and be acquainted with them, and all promised me that I should find peace and comfort in so doing” (Howe, H 40). In the hermitage Laurence has a glorious apotheosis of the book, a dream of “a mighty volume” in which he “wished I might read and read forever” (Howe, H 49). But Howe is ultimately very clear that the temptation of this literary/spiritual realm of luminous imaginings must not be severed from the material. Laurence ultimately calls his time in the Count’s hermitage “my evil days” (Howe, H 163) because there “in my zeal for the entire subjugation of the body, I studiously neglected every necessity of phys-
ical life” (Howe, H 45), and when Ronald enters the hermitage and finds him there, Laurence is nearly dead. Throughout the novel, Laurence repeatedly declares that he is “nothing,” but Howe never lets him so escape the body. Much of the most remarkable language in this novel comes in the evocations of Laurence’s troubling flesh, Ronald’s urgently physical desire, or the corporeal imprisonment offered by women’s corsets. Near the end of the manuscript a doctor gravely remarks, “I cannot pronounce Laurent either man or woman . . . but I shall speak more justly if I say that he is rather both than neither” (Howe, H 195).

In this essay I have argued that such unsettling “bothness” is a crucial aspect of literary production itself, the reciprocity and contradictions between the imaginative mobility of texts—those voices in the library of the mind that cross space, time, genre, and all the constraints of any particular authorial body or situation—and the material conditions of books. In the last pages of Howe’s manuscript, Laurence in some feverish trance fears that he is about to be buried while still alive. It is a classic gothic anxiety, a favorite of Poe and Lippard, and also a vivid instance of the asymmetrical relations between body and soul. Laurence’s condition—hovering near death, but not inanimate—is undoubtedly part of what “strands” this text, Howe’s strategic problem of producing an ending. Laurence is her narrator; how he can die and yet tell us this story? The conventional solution of course, as in Poe’s “Manuscript Found in a Bottle,” is the manuscript, those scraps of paper that can carry words beyond death. But let me end with a final irony, and note how my discussion of the ways that The Hermaphrodite illuminates the dual nature of all literary artifacts, as at once text and thing, depends upon this manuscript having at last become a published book.

Notes

1. The Julia Ward Howe Papers are in the Houghton Library, Harvard University. For the central manuscript texts for The Hermaphrodite, see the prose compositions collected in MS Am 2214 (320 box 4) and the scrapbook (321 box 3). Howe’s letter to Louisa Ward on May 15, 1847, is item 537 and Howe’s diary from the 1860s is item 814 in collection MS Am 2119.

2. Howe uses the rhyme as the first line of the cheerful opening stanza to the poem “Mortal and Immortal”:

   Oh! Life is strange, and full of change,
   But it brings me little sorrow,
   For I came to the world but yesterday
   And I shall go hence to-morrow. (PF 176)

3. See Miller 19.
4. There is no information beyond the manuscript itself to explain its condition. It seems generally to be the case that first pages, the most exposed part of any manuscript text, are the most often lost. In his introduction and textual notes Williams provides a helpful description both of the condition in which he found this manuscript and of his practices in sequencing the pieces to form a plausible narrative line.

5. See “Original Memoir: Daniel Schlesinger, the Pianist,” The New-York Mirror, September 7, 1839, and “The Burial of Schlesinger,” The Musical Magazine, November 23, 1839. Howe’s poem ends with a contrast between the ephemeral and bodily aspects of musical performance and the capacity of other arts, including poetry, to construct more lasting monuments—a set of concerns closely related to the ones I discuss in this essay:

The sculptor in his chiseled stone,
The painter in his colors blent,
The bard in numbers all his own,
Raises himself his monument:
But he, whose every touch could wake
A passion and a thought control,
He who, to bless the ear, did make
Music of his very soul;
Who bound for us, in golden chains,
The golden links of harmony—
Naught is left us of his strains,
Naught but their fleeting memory:
Then while a trace of him remains, Shall we not cherish it tenderly?

6. For a contemporary report on Samuel Howe’s fund-raising tour for the Greek cause that emphasizes the Byron connection, see “Greece,” Connecticut Courant (Hartford, CT, February 18, 1828). Charles Dickens included a lengthy and highly celebratory account of Samuel Howe’s work with Laura Bridgman in his American Notes (42–59). For Julia’s perspective on her husband’s celebrity with literary figures in Britain, see Reminiscences 88, 96.

7. Diary, April 23, 1865; see Williams, HH 212, 232, and Ziegler 105.

8. Letter to Louisa Ward Crawford, February 15, 1846; see Williams, HH 77, and Ziegler 42.

9. For a fuller account of the pulls of the material and the spiritual in the Howes’ marital relations, see Marianne Noble’s essay in the current volume.

10. Longfellow finished Evangeline on February 27, 1847, and it was published on October 30; see the letter from Samuel G. Howe to Henry W. Longfellow dated November 8, 1847, in the Samuel Gridley Howe Papers. I am grateful to James W. Trent for calling my attention to this letter. For a fine chronology of Longfellow’s life, including the founding of the Five of Clubs and these composition and publication dates, see Irmscher.

11. Howe often uses “fashionable” derisively. For examples, see Howe, Rem 49 and 409. As Nina Baym demonstrates in Novels, Readers, and Reviewers, the major criteria for literary reviews of these decades were neither aesthetic nor entertaining but moral.

12. An understanding of sexual relation as more crucially constituted by dissatisfaction, failure, and loss than by fulfillment has motivated much important work in queer theory in a way Howe’s novel can be seen as anticipating. See, for example, Bersani, Homos, and Heather Love, Feeling Backward.
13. My reading of Howe has been much influenced by Dana Luciano’s discussion of the ways *The Hermaphrodite* imagines desires that evade and exceed heterosexual-reproductive accounts of family and lineage. See “Unrealized: The Queer Time of *The Hermaphrodite*” in this volume.

14. For an account of the way “marble” replaces “flesh” in this novel and the many actual sculptures that inform Howe’s trope, see Bergland, “Cold Stone: Sex and Sculpture in *The Hermaphrodite*,” in this volume.

15. Interestingly, Howe’s poem “To a Beautiful Statue” begins with the speaker’s desire to animate a stone figure. This subject, so close to the topic of Ronald’s composition, seems to have been composed during the years of her work on this manuscript. It is one of Howe’s pieces included in Griswold’s *Female Poets of America* (1849) on p. 323.

16. The ambiguity of this scene was first pointed out to me by Bethany Schneider during a meeting of the Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers Study Group focused on this novel that Elizabeth Young and I hosted at Amherst College in 2005. Schneider has now elaborated her insight elsewhere in this volume.

17. See Williams’s essay in this volume “‘The Cruelest Enemy of Beauty’: Sand’s Gabriel, Howe’s Laurence.”

18. For the social utility of manuscript form into the seventeenth century, see also Harold Love.

19. The classic studies, of course, are by Ian Watt (1957), Michael McKeon (1987), and Elizabeth L. Eisenstein (1980). Margaret Doody’s work not only expands Watt and McKeon’s origin story for the novel geographically and temporally, but in doing so also complicates its relation to print; still, Doody concurs that the appetite for fictional narrative was “at once stimulated and gratified by the new invention: the printing press” (214).

20. The text of “Ashes of an angel’s heart” is sixteen pages long in the University of Nebraska Press edition of *The Hermaphrodite* and over thirty in Howe’s handwritten pages.

21. Longfellow’s Evangeline follows her Gabriel across the American landscape through scenes that are often quite similar to those Nina imagines. In clear distinction to Nina’s visionary travel with her lover, however, Longfellow’s stress is on the failure of Evangeline’s actual journey to ever quite close the physical gap that divides the maiden from her betrothed:

   Into this wonderful land, at the base of the Ozark Mountains,
   Gabriel far had entered, with hunters and trappers behind him.
   Day after day, with their Indian guides, the maiden and Basil
   Followed his flying steps, and thought each day to o’ertake him.
   Sometimes they saw, or thought they saw, the smoke of his camp-fire
   Rise in the morning air from the distant plain; but at nightfall,
   When they had reached the place, they found only embers and ashes.
   (Longfellow 126)

22. Luciano presents this scene in just such idealized terms as an instance of the “queer time” of this literary text and our own twenty-first-century encounter with it; see “Unrealized.”